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ABSTRACT

Networking is an information giving and receiving system, a support system, and a means whereby women can get ahead in careers--either in new jobs or in current positions. Networking information can create many opportunities: women can talk about how other women handle situations and tasks, and previously established contacts can be used in clearing the path for subordinates or peers. In addition, networking offers support to other women in a business fashion. They can, for example, help women by informing them about jobs before they are advertised. Several key points can help networking work, including investment of time, the use of business cards, the establishment of an organized, structured system, the maintenance of a card file classifying members by subject categories, the maintenance of social and business contacts, involvement in several different networks, and the demonstration of trust and loyalty to the network. (HOD)

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INTRODUCTION

The definition given by Mary Scott Welch in the opening chapter of her book, Networking, is quickly becoming the accepted version:

> "It's the process of developing and using your contacts for information, advice, and moral support as you pursue your career. It's linking the women you know to the women they know in an ever-expanding communications network. It's building a community of working women, across professional and occupational lines, outside the old boy's network. It's helping each other to become more effective in the work world - with more clout, more money, more know-how, more self-confidence. It's beating the system that isolates women as they move up in male-dominated environments. It's asking for help when you need it - knowing when you need it, knowing whom and how to ask for it. It's giving help, too, serving as a resource for other women. In sum, it's getting together to get ahead."

Networking describes a process that has been in use for some time. However, it is considered new because it describes that process happening with a new group of people, people once left out of the process; women. Networking is basically an activity that this organization, i.e., the SCA, knows quite well; communication. The principles of interpersonal communication and of group dynamics are the principles of networking.

Networking grows out of the women's movement, but as Wilson points out, differs sharply in rationale from feminist thinking of the early 70's. Then women on the outside of corporate life hoped to change the system, and in that way, permit women full access to full opportunities. Networks, however, plan to become a part of the system before attempting to change it.

Welch divides networking into two basic kinds: 1) In-house groups and, 2) Groups that cross company lines. She suggests that in-house groups may be vertical (including women who hold all levels of jobs, top to

bottom) or horizontal (including women at comparable levels). In-house groups may be issue groups that come together around one topic, and later dissolve when that topic has been satisfactorily addressed. She also points out that in-house groups may be overground or underground. Metha in "Networking: A Model for Change," describes three levels of networking:

Level 1 - The "I" level. Personal - what you can do as an individual to feel more powerful.

Level 2 - The "We" level. Interpersonal - who are your advocates and,

Level 3 - The "Us" level. Intergroup - political groups, lobbying efforts, laws, etc.

Networking may be defined several different ways, but for purposes of this paper, networking is defined as an organized, formal group, a process of bringing people and resources together. This paper divides networking into three parts: Part I What Networking Is; Part II An Example of Networking and, Part III How to Use Networking.

Part I. What Networking Is

Networking is basically an information giving and receiving system, a support system and, ultimately, a means whereby women can get ahead in careers - either in new jobs or in current positions.

First, networking is an information system; a process to gain information; and a process to give it. Information is power. Information is often what women have lacked, and what has kept them from power. Lack of information has probably been the factor most responsible for keeping women at the bottom of the ladder. Information provides a power base when one has sources that others do not have. It enhances prestige; it gives legitimacy. Information

provides charisma because it affects how you carry yourself. Networks are closely linked with power, authority and the capacity to influence behavior, primarily because they are information giving. Women have learned that men do not have a corner on the information market; they just had a corner on its use. Women are in places where they, too, have powerful information, whether they are vice-presidents or secretaries. They have information on how to work with an important person (male or female) or what is happening in another part of the organization.

Networking information creates many opportunities. For example:

1) Women can talk about how other women handle situations. "What do you do when you're the only woman at the meeting, and you're pretty sure the strategy was decided on in the men's room during break?" Or, it may be information on job-related tasks, "what are you doing at your college for faculty professional growth?" It may be topics strictly of interest woman to women, or it may be general information collecting. It may be ideas you can apply in your own work or it may be information you can use to your advantage just by having it. "I was talking to the academic vice-president of Central University the other day, and she says they are implementing a new program in faculty development this year with emphasis on speakers on campus." The boss will be impressed that you have this information at hand, and you will be in a better position as a result.
2) You may talk about how other women handle tasks. "How do you tell a staff member his work is unsatisfactory?" You may find new strategies or you may not. You may learn that what you had planned, or implemented, is what is suggested. But it is reassuring to know that. I had read

books for several years telling me that women were reluctant to check an idea or an action with others, afraid to let someone else know they were uncertain. Even so, I was truly surprised a few years back when, in casual conversation, I learned the college president had called another college president to say "I have to present this problem to the Board of Trustees. How would you handle it?" I think my naviety was not so much that that had happened, but that it was done with such casualness, and spoken of with such casualness. "Good Heavens," I thought, "I'll bet they do that all the time."

3) Previously established contacts can also be useful in clearing the path for subordinates or peers. For example, a faculty member tells me he is interested in expanding our Asian studies to include a field studies trip to Japan, but he is not quite sure how to do it. "Maybe I can help you; Southwest University has such a program and I know the dean there. Also, I know the director of the Asia Department at United Widgets - I am sure he would be glad to talk with us, too." Not only have you supported your college and your colleague, but the word will get around: she can help you, she has information, she has contacts.

Networking meets information needs for women. It is a clearinghouse; a place to go to find out. Networking provides paths of assistance; a chain that leads you where you need to be. Networking is a formal operation of information communications.

Secondly, networking is a support system. It is knowing there is someone else out there you can call on for help, for advice. Men should be part of women's networks, but for support there is no one like another woman.

Women understand the problems of other working women; you do not have to explain or give reasons, you only have to say "Help."

It is lonely at the top. For women, it is especially lonely. After the initial blush, it's hard to be the first woman vice-president, the first woman on the board, to constantly be reminded that you are the only one of that kind. As one moves up the corporate or collegiate ladder, old confidants fall away usually of their own volition. New contacts must be formed, with others in similar positions.

Perhaps this aspect of networking, finding the support, is not as hard as accepting it once it is found. This aspect depends on listening and listening well. The support may not come in the form of someone mopping off the sweat and blood and saying to you, "Get back in there and fight." The support may say gently that you have picked the wrong fight. Can you hear that? It is particularly hard for women, especially so, because they have worked so hard at being tough, at letting the world know they can "take it." The support may be saying, "It's time to let him win one." "But I'm right," you reply, "I know I'm right." "That may be so, but it may not be as important as letting him win this one." It is a hard lesson for women to learn. If a support system is to be useful, however, it must provide both strokes and criticism.

It is also important not to confuse the network support system with friendship. Women may be fond of others in the network and they may, at least they should, see others in the network socially. But networking support is strictly business. If someone in the network doesn't come through with the job, the information, the help expected, assume it is because at that time, because of other pressures,

she simply could not. Do not retaliate by thinking she is no longer a useful networking colleague, and elininating her from your future contacts. Look around, men do not do that.

This past year, I had an associate dean position vacant. There were two prime candidates, both men. One got the job, the other did not. The unsuccessful one came to me later and said he was pleased to have been an applicant, was still interested in administrative work, would I keep him in mind if any special tasks came up during the year. He was pleasant and appeared interested in working with me and for the college. A few months later, I had a new project I wanted to try; this man will head it and at little extra pay. He is wisely making an investment that stands to pay off on moving him toward his career goals.

Finally, to partake of and to give information and support, it is not necessary to like each other. She may be liberal and you are conservative, she may play golf and you go to the symphony. It does not matter. The information exchanged is valuable. In a tight situation, she can give support; it may be the two of you against the multitude for one issue. Provide an opportunity for her that uses her talents well, and she can reciprocate. Partnerships forms, dissolve and reform, depending on mutual needs and the time.

Thirdly, networking can be used to advance careers. This may occur in the position now held or within one's present company. Advancement is based on many factors, and how well the job is done, the knowledge held is not the sole or even the primary factor. How women or men present themselves may be of greater important. Scott reminds us that women "...do not

realize that professional advancement is something that must be sought, seized and retained." Women have believed that only performance and merit will be used in considering promotions, but individual style is frequently the key factor.

Networking of course, may be the most useful tool when job movement is a goal. It can help women know about jobs before they are advertised. It can bring a nomination for a position, a much better route than a blind application.

Networking, then, is an information system, a support system, a system for career advancement. Networking should be entered into with total self-interest. Self-esteem is a prerequisite for networking. It should also be understood that networking is an elitist concept. You may want many people for your friends, but for your network, you want only those who can help you. To state it bluntly, you want those who can be <u>useful</u> to you. Your goal is leadership and leadership is elitist.

Part II. <u>An Example of Networking</u>

The St. Louis Leadership Program started in 1976, sponsored by the Danforth Foundation. It had been preceded by two fellowship programs. These programs had been formed to encourage community leadership and had assumed leadership talents were indigenous to formal college degrees. It was soon demonstrated that this was not true and that community leadership developed in the program grew more provencial in later years.

The St. Louis Leadership Program sought to identify people already in policymaking positions, and to identify the previously disenfranchised,

especially blacks and women. (There are now some sixty leadership programs nationally. Philadelphia's Community Leadership Seminar is the oldest at 22 years; Detroit's program is the youngest. There is a National Association of Community Leadership Programs.)

Otis Jackson, Director of the St. Louis program describes the program as follows, "the St. Louis Leadership Program seeks to bring people into a structured, controlled enrivonment, to expose people to new options. Employing a rational approach, it seeks to help people emerge from their own individualism. It encourages linkages among people who would not have come together otherwise." Dr. Jackson emphasizes the need to think about networking the way a lawyer would - to a lawyer contacts, and lots of them are among the most important activities she engages in - her livelihood depends on contacts.

The program invites applicants and accepts about fifty persons each year through an intensive screening process that involves a written application, recommendations and interviews. Participants are selected from the public, private, and volunteer sector. The program is itself a network.

The training extends over ten months, September through May. In my class, the 78-79 year, there was a beginning and ending weekend seminar, and a two-day workshop each month. One day was devoted to community issues; housing, education, medical care, etc. The second day was given to leadership questions. Time was scheduled for large and small cocktail parties and for dinners at each other's homes. Dr. Jackson felt participants needed practice at these business activities, and saw this as

integral to network forming.

There were opportunities for the new leadership to become familiar with the old leadership. We were encouraged to make these opportunities for ourselves. With the name of the program behind us, it was easy to arrange breakfasts with important community leaders. A corporate leader, talking in a group of four or five was apt to be quite candid in discussions of leadership, power or community politics.

An obvious outgrowth of the program was a formal networking group, the St. Louis Metro Forum. Membership is available to all program alumni. The group meets once each month (dinner or cocktails) and there is usually a speaker. There is a newsletter for information exchange, and there is a listing of alumni published yearly with names, phone numbers, addresses, and current positions.

Early in the program, it appeared to me there was an emphasis on male leadership. Speakers, role models, group leaders, were always men. My opinion was confirmed one day during a quick, unplanned caucus that occured in the women's room. Out of this grew an informal networking group of some 6-8 women. Our original purpose was: (1) our own sanity and, (2) meetings we arranged outside the scheduled program with women speakers or other women in leadership positions. That group has continued and resulted in some strong network ties.

There are informal network groups, too. Through this association, two of us have become the only women to head major divisions in the 1980 United Way Campaign. One of our group had worked her way up through the powerful United Way hierarchy to a position as the only woman on

the Steering Committee. She had the opportunity to appoint division heads and brought other women into the campaign.

At the end of the campaign, I asked her about the experience, what had she learned. She said that now she has sat at a headtable in front of hundreds of people and now she would not have to worry again about whether one crosses ones legs or not. Also, she did say she felt at a great disadvantage sometimes because she did not have the contacts others on the Steering Committee had. But she reported that United Way staff often felt a lack of support from campaign volunteers, and this was something she could provide. She concluded she needed to continue to cultivate important community contacts, probably men, but that she felt her contribution had been significant, useful, and unique.

Factors that helped make this networking experience unique was that it included men, attempted to link many community sectors, and provided linkage opportunities nationally with other professionals from many fields.

Part III. How to Use Networks

Hennig suggests that women need to understand that careers are influenced by growth in status and influence as well as by skill and expertise.

Further, women are in a unique position to add to this status and influence. As the private sector turns more to human and community needs, women, who have been seen as leaders in these social areas, will be in demand for service on boards and councils. Women now in their 40's and 50's are often at a point in career development that qualifies them to serve in

these areas. Schwartz has identified this group as one whose time has come, uniquely positioned to perform this function.

Forming and using networks can advance women. At first, using networks may seem unfeminine and unacademic. Women have been trained to wait for the phone to ring. In networking, women must initiate. Practice will make it easier. Here are several key points to make networking work for you.

1. Networking takes time. It has to be given a priority along with all other tasks. It is not wasting time. You must schedule time to make calls, write notes, have lunches and drinks after work. The return on the time invested is information, referrals, feedback. It is the opportunity to act instead of reacting.
2. To use a network, you do not need to see or contact each person often. Just keep in touch from time to time.
3. You must set up an organized system. Use 3 x 5 note cards, assigning a name to each card. Classify them by subject categories. Note on the card, each time a contact is made. Flag them with colored clips for code messages; red clips, something promised; blue clips, she owes me.
4. Carry business cards and use them. They are not pretentious. They are efficient, clear message carriers.
5. Make a schedule that causes you to call or see x number of people in your network each week: one breakfast, two lunches, one after work drink per week.
6. Make sure a new card is added to your file each week.

7. Make sure the file contains both men and women.
8. If you are not making two out-of-state telephone calls per week, you are losing ground - keep a tally.
9. Never turn down an offer to speak before a group.
10. Identify a new area of involvement that will enhance your career, make a plan, and list who can help you get there.
11. Do your part to keep the trust level high among network participants; you must demonstrate loyalty to the network; do not get too big for it. You must control the information you get and the information you give. You must avoid being manipulative; networking is not using people for your own ends. It is give and take; it is a sharing concept. Failure to do these things will cause your network to become dysfunctional.
12. When you form a formal network group, there must be a structure if all are to have the opportunity to be involved.
13. Be in several different networks; one of women in your work place, one of persons from different backgrounds who belong to your profession, one that crosses professional lines.
14. Ask others to do something for you; it is the surest way to gain a supporter.

Most importantly, networking means that you make your communication skills work for you, that you take an active position and become a positive force in a network that helps you and others move toward your goals. Networking means growth, influence, advancement, and support. It means working with people - men and women. It means asking for help and giving help. It means your future.

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